



## California Department of Veterans Affairs News

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*"No agency is an island or an entity unto itself, and we at CDVA certainly cherish our partnerships that help us collectively serve those who have already served us."*

*Tom Johnson*

### SENATE APPROVES SB 1455 TO CREATE GOLD STAR FAMILY LICENSE PLATES

The State Senate has approved SB 1455 (Cogdill and Denham), thus paving the way for families who have lost loved ones to the current war on terror and prior wars to be able to purchase Gold Star Family License Plates, to honor the sacrifices their families have endured. This bill now moves on to the Assembly, where it is scheduled for its first hearing in the Transportation Committee on June 16, 2008.

"I am pleased and gratified that the State Senate approved SB 1455, thus allowing Gold Star Family License Plates to be purchased by military families," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Tom Johnson. "It is only right that families wishing to acknowledge the loss of a family member who died for the cause of freedom be allowed to proudly display these license plates."



### Message from the Secretary

The English poet John Donne wrote, "no man is an island entirely of itself," he could have said the same about entities that help veterans. In carrying out the mission of our Department, we cannot be an island; we must have partnerships in both the public and private sectors. Within the private sector, we work with our partners in the veterans community.

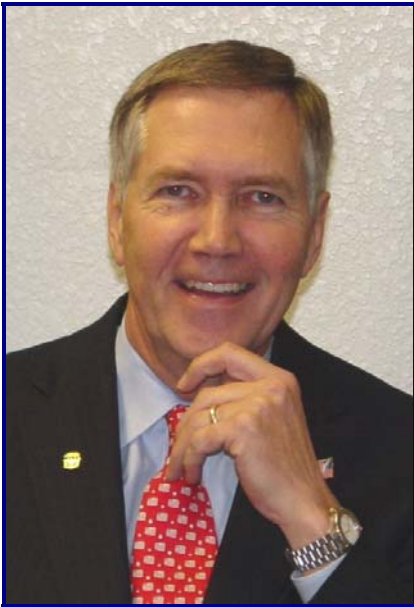
In California these are populated by the many veteran service organizations, such as AMVETS, Veterans of Foreign Wars, The American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, and many others. And in terms of providing services to veterans, nonprofit organizations, like those in the California Association of Veteran Service Agencies (CAVSA), are among the leaders nationally in providing services in the areas of rehabilitation, job training, education and housing. In this brief article I want to focus on the public sector partners we have in carrying out our mission "To Serve California's Veterans And Their Families."

There are three primary partners that we have in the public sector. First is the United State Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). They can be accessed through their website at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov). The veterans that they serve can be

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## Message from the Secretary cont:



*“The USDVA is the primary agency responsible for the health care and benefits offered to veterans by our nation. This fact is often misunderstood.”*

*Tom Johnson*

young or old. There are 23.8 million veterans in this country and together with 37 million spouses, dependents and survivors of deceased veterans; this constitutes about 20% of the U.S. population. The USDVA has three major components, Health Care, Benefits and Memorial Affairs. Here at the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CDVA) we interface with each one of these components on a regular basis. The USDVA is the primary agency responsible for the health care and benefits offered to veterans by our nation. This fact is often misunderstood. Even the definition of who is a veteran is misunderstood by some of the younger soldiers who have recently been discharged but somehow believe a "veteran" has to be old. There is a long definition of "veteran" in section 980 of the Military and Veterans Code but the short of it is you must have served on active duty, have received a DD 214, and to receive certain benefits, must have been discharged under honorable conditions.

In the area of Health Care, the USDVA serves the veterans in our state through two Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) with a combined total of 10 Medical Centers, 22 Vet Centers and 50 Community Based Outpatient Clinics or "CBOCs." Recently the USDVA announced that for combat veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq, including those in the National Guard and Reserve, they would be extending the period of eligibility for free health care related to that combat from 2 to 5 years. They have beefed up their mental health services as well and have paid particular attention to the issue of suicides by placing a suicide prevention counselor at every Medical Center and establishing a suicide prevention hotline (1-800-273-8255) for help.

In the area of Benefits, the USDVA has three Regional Offices located in Oakland, San Diego and Los Angeles, and CDVA also has a District Office within each of the three USDVA Regional sites. Determination of benefits is a complicated process, which depends upon collecting the right information and having it processed in a timely and effective manner. This takes good training, good systems, and a commitment to service, although these are areas ripe for continued improvement at all levels.

The third area within the USDVA focuses on Memorial Affairs. There are seven USDVA national cemeteries in California with another one due to open in Bakersfield late this year and an expansion planned for the cemetery in San Diego. California has one state veterans cemetery in operation, in Shasta County, with another "on the books" in Monterey County pending financial requirements that must be met pursuant to statute. All in all, our partnership with the USDVA is strong and respectful and firmly focused as important to our State (for it brings more than \$6 billion to California each year), but more importantly, it is important to our veterans and their families.

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## Message from the Secretary cont:

The second public agency partners we have are our County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs), with more than 250 of them serving in 56 Counties. Although they are county employees, they are the true "boots on the ground" professionals that provide services where the "rubber meets the road" as far as how veterans are served in California. I mentioned earlier how complicated the benefits process or even the USDVA health care system can be to navigate. Well, the CVSOs try to demystify the system and bring valuable guidance to veterans and their family members. They complete necessary applications or paperwork, they make referrals, they counsel and give information, and in general act as the advisors and advocates for veterans, young or old, who are entering the USDVA or state veterans arena. They too have a web site, which can be reached at [www.cacvso.org](http://www.cacvso.org).

The third public agency partners are our own state agencies, such as the Labor and Workforce Development Agency, the State and Consumer Services Agency, the Health and Human Services Agency, and of course, the California National Guard. These and other state agencies provide valuable assistance and support to further our mission in many areas. For instance, the Labor and Workforce Development Agency administers educational and job training grants, as well as oversees the Employment Development Department's veterans service and outreach programs such as the One Stops, Real Life Lines, Hire a Hero events and the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). At the Consumer Services Agency they oversee the Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise program and administer the Title 38 USDVA approval process. We have great relationships with these agencies and work to include them in our overall strategy of improving our services to the veterans of this great state. State agency information can be found on the California Website at [www.ca.gov](http://www.ca.gov).

This is a brief summary of our main public partners in carrying out our CDVA mission. I would encourage you to visit their websites, as well as our department's website at [www.cdva.ca.gov](http://www.cdva.ca.gov) to find out veterans specific information you may wish to have. No agency is an island or an entity unto itself, and we at CDVA certainly cherish our partnerships that help us collectively serve those who have already served us.

**Tom Johnson**  
Secretary



*"In this brief article I want to focus on the public sector partners we have in carrying out our mission "To Serve California's Veterans and Their Families."*

*Tom Johnson*





## Greater Los Angeles Ventura Counties Veterans Homes Project Update

The Greater Los Angeles Ventura Counties veterans homes project has been delayed by six weeks due to inclement weather. This project, or GLAVC as it is known, consists of veterans homes being built in West Los Angeles, Lancaster, and Ventura. The West Los Angeles veterans home will serve as home base for the Lancaster and Ventura veterans homes. All three of these veterans homes will function as one unit. Lou Koff has been appointed as the head administrator responsible for all three homes. Koff will have two individuals running the day-to-day operations of the Lancaster and Ventura veterans homes reporting to him.

At the West Los Angeles Veterans Home site, underground building electrical and plumbing work continues at a steady pace. The foundation has begun to be constructed, thus providing a visible footprint for the building to be erected. When completed in December of 2009, the West Los Angeles veterans home will serve approximately 396 veterans. West Los Angeles is a vibrant community of diverse people. The area boasts a plethora of entertainment possibilities, houses of worship, recreational opportunities, and educational outlets.

At the Lancaster Veterans Home site, workers have been busy pouring the foundation and slab concrete. Framing work should begin very shortly. The city of Lancaster will offer future home members a community in which to live that is safe and enjoyable with great people, parks, and community programs.

The city of Ventura offers an area rich in culture with easy access to the ocean, mountains, parks, and plenty of recreational activities such as whale watching, hiking, and nature walks. Currently at the construction site of the Ventura Veterans Home the interior footings have been poured, the anchor bolt layout completed, and waterproofing of the retaining walls has begun. When completed, home members will have a very nice call home.



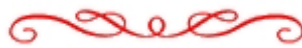
## Congress Passes HEART Act; CalVet Home Loans to be Available to Veterans of Recent Conflicts

[www.soldiersperspective.us](http://www.soldiersperspective.us)

The Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax (HEART) Act, H.R. 6081, passed the House on a 403-0 vote and the Senate by unanimous consent. H.R. 6081 provides a number of important tax benefits to military members. **Most significant for California veterans is that this legislation makes veterans who entered active military duty after December 31, 1976 eligible for Qualified Veterans Mortgage Bonds (QVMB) under the state's longstanding CalVet Home Loan Program.** Among other benefits made available by H.R. 6081 are:

- Makes permanent the ability to include tax-exempt pay received in a combat zone to qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC);
- Permits reservists to make penalty free withdrawals from retirement plans to cover unexpected financial issues associated with activation;
- Provides a tax credit for differential wage payments made to Reserve Component members by civilian employers;
- Permits employers of Reserve Component members to consider activated members killed on active duty to be considered returned to employment on the day prior to death for purposes of benefit accrual;
- Extends to five years the period for which veterans may amend a tax return to recover overpayment of tax as a result of delayed disability awards;
- Permits contribution of military death gratuity payments to Roth IRAs and Education Savings Accounts;
- Designates housing allowances paid to military members as "support and maintenance in-kind" for determination of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits;

H.R. 6081 currently awaits the Presidential signature that will make these provisions law.



## Bush Confers Highest Military Decoration on Fallen Navy SEAL from California

By John J. Kruzal American Forces Press Service

President Bush posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor April 8 to Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael A. Monsoor, a Navy SEAL whose mortal sacrifice in Iraq saved the lives of two fellow SEALs and several Iraqi soldiers.

The fallen SEAL's parents, George and Sally Monsoor, accepted the honor on their son's behalf during a White House ceremony. The Medal of Honor, awarded for gallantry in combat exceeding the call of duty, is the nation's highest military decoration.

"In September 2006, Michael laid down his life for his brothers in arms," Bush said. "Today, we remember the life of this faithful Navy SEAL, and on behalf of a grateful nation, we will present Michael Monsoor's family with the Medal of Honor that he earned."

*Service...*

*Giving what  
you don't have  
to give.*

*Giving when  
you don't need  
to give.*

*Giving  
because you  
want to give.*

*Damien Hess.*

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## Bush Confers Highest Military Decoration on Fallen Navy SEAL from California cont:



*This photo provided by the Navy shows Navy SEAL Michael A. Monsoor, left, on patrol in Iraq in 2006.*

*"One of the survivors puts it this way: 'Mikey looked death in the face that day and said, "You cannot take my brothers. I will go in their stead.'"*

*President Bush, quoting one of the SEALs saved by Monsoor.*

Monsoor, a 25 year-old machine gunner with SEAL Team 3, was providing security at a sniper lookout post on Sept. 29, 2006, in Ramadi, Iraq, when a fragmentation grenade hit his chest and bounced to the floor. Positioned next to the single exit, only Monsoor could have escaped harm.

Instead, he threw himself onto the grenade. Monsoor used his body to absorb the blast and shield two nearby SEALs. The SEALs and eight Iraqi soldiers survived, some with wounds, others unscathed. Monsoor died a half hour later.

"One of the survivors puts it this way: 'Mikey looked death in the face that day and said, "You cannot take my brothers. I will go in their stead,'"" said Bush, quoting one of the SEALs saved by Monsoor.

In remarks today, the president characterized the petty officer as an unlikely candidate for the SEALs. As a child, he suffered from asthma attacks and coughing fits that routinely landed him in the hospital, Bush said.

But the asthmatic child resolved to wean himself off his inhaler, strengthening his lungs by challenging his siblings in swimming races. The determined child grew into a young man who eventually completed SEAL training, which Bush called the "ultimate test of physical endurance."

"Less than a third of those who begin this training become SEALs," he said. "But Mike would not be denied a spot."

The maritime component of U.S. Special Operations Command, Navy SEALs are expert reconnoiters and stealth warriors, often performing clandestine operations that larger forces cannot conduct undetected. Today Monsoor became the first SEAL to earn the Medal of Honor for actions in Iraq and the second SEAL to receive the award since Sept. 11, 2001.

Monsoor will be inducted tomorrow into the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes, where his name will be engraved alongside some 3,445 recipients of the nation's highest honor.

The petty officer previously was awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star with combat "V" device, and a Purple Heart before becoming the fourth servicemember to receive the Medal of Honor since the beginning of operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Awarded by the president in the name of Congress, the Medal of Honor was created in 1861 as a personal award of valor for members of the Navy. Today, every service branch confers the rare honor upon those who distinguish themselves "conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life."

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## Bush Confers Highest Military Decoration on Fallen Navy SEAL from California cont:

"The Medal of Honor is awarded for an act of such courage that no one could rightly be expected to undertake it," the president said. "Yet those who knew Michael Monsoor were not surprised when he did."

For more information on Petty Officer Monsoor, visit [www.navy.mil/moh/monsoor/index.html](http://www.navy.mil/moh/monsoor/index.html).

[www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story\\_id=36317](http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=36317)



## Attention Veterans:

The USDVA has three main grant programs to assist disabled veterans with necessary home modifications.

### What Is a Specially Adapted Housing Grant?

Veterans who have specific service-connected disabilities may be entitled to a grant for the purpose of constructing an adapted home or modifying an existing home to meet their adaptive needs. The goal of the Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) Grant Program is to provide a barrier-free living environment, which affords the veteran a level of independent living that he or she may not have otherwise enjoyed. The SAH grant is generally used to create a wheelchair accessible home. This grant is currently limited to \$50,000.

The SAH grant is available to veterans who have a service-connected disability due to military service, entitling them to compensation for permanent and total disability due to:

- the loss or loss of use of both lower extremities, such as to preclude locomotion without the aid of braces, crutches, canes, or a wheelchair, or
- blindness in both eyes, having only light perception, plus loss or loss of use of one lower extremity, or
- the loss or loss of use of one lower extremity together with (1) residuals of organic disease or injury, or (2) the loss or loss of use of one upper extremity, which so affects the functions of balance or propulsion as to preclude locomotion without the aid of braces, crutches, canes, or a wheelchair or,
- the loss or losses of use of both upper extremities such as to preclude use of the arms at or above the elbow.

### What Is a Special Home Adaptation Grant?

Veterans who have specific service-connected disabilities may be entitled to a grant for the purpose of modifying an existing home to meet their adaptive needs. The Special Home Adaptations (SHA) grant is generally used to assist veterans with mobility throughout their homes. This grant is currently limited to \$10,000.

The SHA grant is available to veterans who have service-connected disability due to military service, entitling them to compensation for permanent and total disability due to:

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## The USDVA has three main grant programs to assist disabled veterans with necessary home modifications cont:

- blindness in both eyes with 5/200 visual acuity or less or,
- the anatomical loss or loss of use of both hands and extremities below the elbow.

### What Is a Home Improvements and Structural Alterations Grant?

Under the Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) program, veterans with service-connected disabilities or veterans with nonservice-connected disabilities may receive assistance for any home improvement necessary for the continuation of treatment or for disability access to the home and essential lavatory and sanitary facilities. A HISA grant is available to veterans who have received a medical determination indicating that improvements and structural alterations are necessary or appropriate for the effective and economical treatment of his/her disability. A veteran may receive both a HISA grant and either a SHA or SAH grant.

### How Can You Apply?

You can apply for the SAH and SHA grants by completing VA Form 26-4555, Veterans Application in Acquiring Specially Adapted Housing or Special Home Adaptation Grant, and submitting it to your local USDVA regional office.

You can apply for a HISA grant by completing USDVA Form 10-0103, Veterans Application for Assistance in Acquiring Home Improvement and Structural Alterations, and submitting it to your local USDVA medical center.

For more information call toll-free 1-800-827-1000 or visit [www.homeloans.va.gov](http://www.homeloans.va.gov) or [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov).

*"The goal of the Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) Grant Program is to provide a barrier-free living environment, which affords the veteran a level of independent living that he or she may not have otherwise enjoyed."*

**USDVA**



## CalVet News



California Department of Veterans Affairs

1227 O Street,  
Room 300

Sacramento, CA 95814

Phone: (916) 653-2158

Fax: (916) 653-1355

E-mail: [NewsforVeterans@cdva.ca.gov](mailto:NewsforVeterans@cdva.ca.gov)

JP Tremblay

Deputy Secretary for External Affairs

Jerry Jones

Chief, Legislation and Public Affairs

Jaime A. Arteaga

Editor



## VA Awards Nearly \$65 Million for California Veterans Homes *Grants for West Los Angeles, Ventura, Lancaster and Yountville*

To continue construction of three major projects for veterans in California, while launching major renovations at a fourth facility, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) has awarded the state nearly \$65 million.

"With these VA grants, the veterans of California can be assured that comfortable, state-of-the-art facilities are available to them in more locations," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "These grants are another demonstration of the USDVA's commitment to California's men and women who have served this nation in uniform."

Grants totaling \$55.3 million will help pay for ongoing construction in West Los Angeles for a 396-bed state veterans nursing home, a 60-bed state veterans domiciliary and adult health care facility in Ventura, and a 60-bed state veterans domiciliary and adult health care facility in Lancaster.

Another grant of \$9.4 million will pay for improvements to the California veterans home in Yountville.

*In addition to the Yountville facility, the California Department of Veterans Affairs currently operates veterans homes in Barstow and Chula Vista. The homes are open to state residents who are veterans at least 62 years old with honorable discharges. The age-limit can be lowered for disabled veterans.*

In July 2007, when VA awarded the state \$124.5 million for the West Los Angeles facility, senior VA officials joined Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger at a ground-breaking ceremony.

This year, VA expects to spend more than \$7.6 billion in California on behalf of the state's 2.1 million veterans. VA operates 10 major medical centers in the state, along with nearly 50 outpatient clinics, 11 nursing homes and 21 Vet Centers.

## Meet Kyle Miyata Larsen, A Life in the Fast Lane

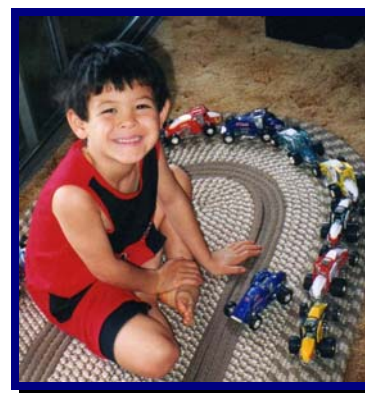
By Diane Miyata

My nephew Kyle was born to race and has been racing since the age of 7. His father Mike, who always wanted to be a race car driver, is now living his dream through his son.

I remember Kyle's early years when I used to baby-sit for him. He would spend hours and hours racing his little brightly colored cars on his racing rug, barely noticing that I was there eager to join in his fun. If I asked him to draw pictures, he would only draw sprint cars. If I took him shopping and told him he could buy anything he wanted, he would gravitate to the Nintendo and Play Station sites and pick out a racing car game.

This kid was determined and so focused on car racing that when his dream of becoming a competitive car racer came true, he immersed himself in the sport so fully he now eats, drinks, and breathes car racing. Kyle's determination and willpower paid off when he became the youngest winner in California history to win at the Placerville Speedway just four days past his 15th birthday. Kyle scored another victory by becoming the first driver under the age of 16 to be allowed to race in World of Outlaws, the premier traveling sprint car series in the nation. Although Kyle is well known in the racing field, he still maintains his kid charm and innocence, as well as remaining well grounded and level headed.

Next up for Kyle: becoming the nation's number one NASCAR driver! I am so proud of him. Way to go Kyle!!!



You can follow Kyle's racing adventures online at [www.kylelarsenracing.com](http://www.kylelarsenracing.com).

## EXERCISE YOUR MIND



M	B	P	A	S	T	F	A	R	C	D	N	A	S	T	R	A
L	A	B	O	R	A	T	O	R	Y	G	E	M	V	W	E	J
V	R	R	P	A	D	M	K	V	J	B	G	L	Y	B	G	F
W	S	K	C	H	U	L	A	V	I	S	T	A	F	D	V	A
A	T	L	D	E	L	L	I	V	T	N	U	O	Y	M	K	U
F	O	S	K	I	L	L	E	D	N	U	R	S	I	N	G	E
H	W	O	J	M	V	L	E	D	A	N	C	I	N	G	R	G
M	D	E	H	Y	L	J	A	O	G	M	B	U	H	M	A	B
U	K	I	D	D	O	T	E	M	I	A	J	E	I	D	P	U
L	O	H	G	M	A	U	B	I	C	K	V	Y	E	K	E	H
K	E	R	A	C	E	T	U	C	A	C	K	U	J	H	V	A
F	R	I	E	N	D	S	H	I	P	P	O	G	I	P	I	W
G	A	W	G	O	E	B	A	L	G	I	E	R	U	A	N	U
J	A	V	W	H	O	M	E	I	K	J	K	D	M	O	E	L
G	F	J	P	K	J	E	D	A	U	E	L	A	J	A	G	O
Y	U	G	D	N	A	M	G	R	E	B	E	N	A	J	C	U
E	M	H	K	A	L	B	I	Y	W	A	V	I	M	H	O	K
W	U	G	V	A	O	E	K	B	U	P	J	A	P	V	A	O
J	I	V	E	T	E	R	A	N	S	E	A	K	E	M	I	F
K	B	A	M	P	V	S	Y	G	E	Y	G	U	J	F	K	F

Find these words associated with the veterans homes. Words are found in every direction: vertical, horizontal, backwards, and diagonal.

ACUTE CARE

ARTS AND CRAFTS

BARSTOW

JANE BERGMAN

DANCING

DOMICILIARY

FRIENDSHIP

LABORATORY

GRAPEVINE

HOME

SKILLED NURSING

LOU KOFF

MEMBERS

CHULA VISTA

JAIME TODD

VETERANS

MARCELLA MCCORMACK

YOUNTVILLE

CHULA VISTA

## Approximately 200 Women Vets Expected at Conference

California is home to approximately 164,000 women veterans. Of this number, very few are taking advantage of the benefits available to them; benefits they have earned. It is therefore of great importance that CalVet expands its outreach efforts to this veterans population.

To help address this problem, CalVet is hosting the first annual **Women Veterans Conference: Continuing our Legacy**, on Friday, August 8 to bring together women veterans to address their special needs. The CalVet Women Veterans Conference has as its purpose:

- To provide a network forum for women veterans from all wars,
- To educate women veterans on their benefits and health care programs available to them, and
- To provide assistance with employment opportunities.

The keynote speaker for the Women Veterans Conference will be Dr. Irene Trowell-Harris, Director of the Center for Women Veterans, located in Washington D.C.

This one-day conference will be held at the Lions Gate Hotel, 3410 Westover, McClellan, CA 95652. Hotel reservations can be made by calling 866-866-7100 before July 7, 2008 to receive the special rate of \$84.

This conference is being co-sponsored by the State of California Commission on the Status of Women and the California Legislative Women's Caucus.



### **CALVET WOMEN VETERANS CONFERENCE: CONTINUING OUR LEGACY REGISTRATION FORM**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Branch of Service: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Needs (Explain):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Please send registration forms to:*

**California Department of Veterans Affairs  
Women and Minority Veterans Affairs  
1227 O Street, Room 300  
Sacramento, CA 95814**

**Forms may also be faxed to 916-651-6262**

## Veterans Homes Statistics as of June 1, 2008

	Chula Vista	Barstow	Yountville
Domiciliary	153	103	658
Residential Care for the Elderly	38	53	45
Skilled Nursing	160		167
Intermediate Care			132
Acute Care			5
Memory Care			40

## THE FINAL WORD

### CalVet Hosts NASDVA Training Convention

The California Department of Veterans Affairs will host the **National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs' (NASDVA) Training Convention** this September 14-18 at the beautiful Napa Valley Marriott Hotel in California's wine country. For more information visit the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs homepage at [www.nasdva.com](http://www.nasdva.com) or CalVet's website at [www.calvet.ca.gov](http://www.calvet.ca.gov) and click on the conference link.

Each year, NASDVA holds two conferences/conventions each year. One conference is in Washington D.C. and the annual training convention is hosted by a state department of veterans affairs. This year, Secretary Tom Johnson and the California Department of Veterans Affairs are hosting the Annual Training Convention.

Governor Schwarzenegger has been invited to attend this convention, where he is to receive NASDVA's "Iron Mike" award for his distinguished service to veterans. The "Iron Mike" award is a government officials' "Service to Veterans Award" for action, courage, compassion, and dedication presented to men and women who have demonstrated great leadership in service to our country's veterans. The "Iron Mike" award will be presented on Wednesday, September 17 during the NASDVA President's Dinner.

**California Department of Veterans Affairs**  
**External Affairs**  
**1227 O Street, Room 300**  
**Sacramento, CA 95814**